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SUBJECT: DELEGATION TO LEBANON: ARAB LEAGUE INITIATIVE
FIZZLES

Derived from: DSCG 05-1, B,D.

¶1. (C) Summary. MinState for Foreign Affairs Al Mahmoud told Ambassador July 2 that a special Arab League delegation that involved him had attempted to mediate between Lebanese factions during a June visit to Beirut to deal with the Lebanese political crisis. The group made no progress, for the initiative soon got bogged down in details. No follow-on engagement by the GOQ is planned. Al Mahmoud answered criticism that the Qataris had not been balanced by emphasizing the number of meetings they sought. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Ahmed Al Mahmoud outlined for Ambassador July 2 some aspects of his recent trip to Lebanon in conjunction with Arab League efforts to find a solution to the political crisis there. Al Mahmoud said that the delegation had given proposals to "both parties" on establishing a government of national unity and ending "attacks and protests." The parties had accepted the proposals initially, but the initiative faltered on the details. Al Mahmoud explained that Lebanese factions put conditions on the proposals, such as reviewing all government resolutions since the resignation of eight ministers in 2006 and questioning whether a national unity government and fresh elections should be dealt with in tandem, which made the initiative untenable to the opposing faction.

¶3. (C) Al Mahmoud explained that the Arab League delegation met with a wide range of political figures from one to four times each. Interlocutors included PM Siniora, President Lahoud, Maronite Patriarch Sfeir, Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea, Maronite politician Michel Aoun, speaker of the parliament Nabih Berri, and Hizballah SecGen Hassan Nasrallah. Al Mahmoud referred to press criticism that the delegation had avoided meeting Druze leader Walid Jumblatt; he said that Jumblatt is not a government official nor a party leader and therefore did not make the group's initial cutoff. Al Mahmoud said that they subsequently met with Jumblatt on several occasions.

¶4. (C) The meeting with Nasrallah took place after being transported in and shuttled between vehicles which they could not see out of. Al Mahmoud said that Nasrallah gave the impression, initially, of someone who could make decisions, in contrast to Nabih Berri. "We felt some movement," he said, but there was no progress at the end because Nasrallah apparently had to confer with others in the March 8 group.

¶5. (C) Al Mahmoud said that the group plans no further engagement. "We have done our part. If the parties want us to come back, they can call us," he said.

¶6. (C) The Ambassador asked whether Qatar supports the Lebanese government. Al Mahmoud replied that Qatar supports a government of national unity. "We're concerned about civil war," he explained. He said the time is now to establish security and stability. He acknowledged the Siniora

government's right "to secure its territory."

17. (C) On Syria, Al Mahmoud said that the Qatari delegation had planned to travel to Damascus if there had been some progress with negotiations in Lebanon, but in the end did not.

Comment

18. (C) The GOQ has sought a regional power-broking role -- on the Palestinian issue, Syria, Sudan, and Lebanon, particularly -- during the past year. Success has been elusive due to a lack of diplomatic weight and the distaste felt by others for Qatari propensity to carry water for the Syrians.
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